

## Genocidal doctors

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Doctors are trained to be humanitarian but have not the expertise to explain why cruelty, suffering, hatred and other evils exist in the world. Doctors do, however, have the responsibility of trying to understand why in this century in several continents some of their profession have conceived, encouraged, organized, promoted, conspired, colluded or collaborated with genocide. This article gives examples from five countries in which doctors played such a role: the activities of doctors in Germany<sup>1</sup> and Japan<sup>2</sup> are not covered. I discuss the conflict between nationalism and medical ethics and ask whether we can educate our doctors better.

### ARMENIANS

A million or more Armenians perished in Turkey in 1915<sup>3</sup>. Two doctors were among 'the ultimate decision-makers in wartime Turkey'<sup>4</sup> who in 1915 drew up the Ten Commandments for the massacre of the Armenians. The senior member, Talat Pasha, was the chief of the Ittihad ruling party which came to power in 1908; he became interior minister, and then in 1917 grand vizier. Both doctors had qualified in Istanbul, where Dr Behaeddin Sakir became professor of medicine and head of the Red Crescent society while Dr Mehmet Nazim, who had trained in Paris also, became chief physician of the Soloniki municipal hospital and later minister of education<sup>5</sup>.

However, Sakir was also political chief of the Special Organization (East) and later field commander of the killer units which in 1918, after the capture of Baku, massacred its Armenians between 15 and 17 September<sup>3</sup>. Nazim, director of 'the wartime Ittihad's terror arm...prided himself on having committed a million murders'. Soon after the armistice in November 1918 both doctors fled from Turkey in a warship of their German ally and, like other top Ittihad leaders and government ministers, were *in absentia* sentenced to death in 1919 and 1920 by Turkish military tribunals for their genocide. Sakir was assassinated in Berlin by an Armenian 'avenger' on 17 April 1922. Nazim returned to Turkey and was hanged in 1926 together with other Ittihad leaders for conspiracy against Mustapha Kemal Atatürk<sup>6</sup>.

Individual doctors were directly involved in the massacres, having poisoned infants, killed children and issued false certificates of death from natural causes. Nazim's brother-in-law Dr Tevfik Rusdu, Inspector-

General of Health Services, organized the disposal of Armenian corpses with thousands of kilos of lime over six months; he became foreign secretary from 1925 to 1938. The mass murders were witnessed and reported by relief organizations, the Red Cross, war correspondents and diplomats from Austria, Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and the USA, and were recorded in the postwar newspapers and trial supplements of the official gazette of the Ottoman government<sup>5-8</sup>. Many doctors were arrested after the war but most of the courts martial were soon dismantled<sup>7</sup>. Only fifteen Turks were ever given death sentences for their part in the massacres, and just three were executed<sup>9</sup>. And when Mehmat Kemal, a sub-district governor, was hanged in April 1919 a crowd which demonstrated in protest consisted largely of students of the medical school of Istanbul University: Kemal is commemorated by a statue in a public square<sup>7</sup>.

Armenian doctors, pharmacists, dentists, nurses and medical students were killed, often with the knowledge and complicity of their Turkish fellow professionals, some of whom, however, did try to shelter their Armenian colleagues<sup>5</sup>. Provincial governors and military commanders who refused to kill Armenians were removed or murdered. However, General Vehib commanding the IIIrd Army did refuse to kill Armenians, court-martialled and hanged a local gendarmerie commander and a brigand chief for their participation in the massacres, and tried to arrest Sakir, who escaped<sup>4</sup>.

Dr Riza Nur was deputy head of the Turkish delegation at the 1923 Lausanne Conference. He had previously threatened to kill any remaining Armenians, and in 1921 had instructed the commander of the Eastern Front occupying the medieval centre of the Armenian Church that 'the relics and traces of the monuments of Ati be wiped off the face of the earth'. At the Conference he denied that there had been any Armenians killed, and declared that any deaths had merely been from 'epidemics, famine and emigration'<sup>10</sup>. The Allies, who were condemned by Lloyd George as abject, cowardly and infamous, accepted this denial. This denial was still being maintained in 1985<sup>10</sup>, although such denials were repeatedly discredited by the evidence of contemporary accounts<sup>3-9,11</sup>.

### ARGENTINA

Paragraphs (d) and (e) of Article II of the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention cover measures intended to

prevent births within a group and to forcibly transfer children of one group to another group. Between 1976 and 1983 the Argentine military dictatorship fought a 'dirty war' against political dissidents. Thousands were arrested and then disappeared, often by being thrown from aircraft into the Atlantic ocean. A police doctor Jorge Berger tortured and performed medical experiments on female detainees. In 1990 he was amnestied and promoted to the post of medical commissioner of Buenos Aires police (since suspended). Dr Norberto Bianco was in charge of the maternity ward at Campo de Mayo military hospital where detained pregnant women gave birth bound and blindfolded. The mothers then 'disappeared' and the hundreds of babies were given to childless mothers of military or police officers for a 'Christian upbringing'. Two children were given to Bianco; he is now in prison<sup>12,13</sup>. A police doctor, Roberto Bettalo, was accused of issuing five death certificates for members of a dissident family but exhumation showed that only four of the coffins had bodies; the fifth contained just baby clothes, the baby having been given for adoption by a military family<sup>14</sup>.

## BOSNIA

In July 1998 Dr Milan Kovacevic, a former Bosnian Serb anaesthetist and hospital director, was accused at the International Criminal Tribunal at The Hague of 14 crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Kovacevic, who was born in a Croatian concentration camp where tens of thousands of Serbs were exterminated in the Second World War, was a senior official of the crisis staff of the Serbian Democratic Party. He was accused of helping to set up concentration camps in Serb areas of Bosnia, and of organizing the transport of Moslems and Croats to these camps where they were massacred<sup>15</sup>. Dr Radovan Karadžić was born in 1945 in Montenegro, where his ancestors had arrived in 1642 and where in 1941 the Croats had killed thousands of Serbs. He studied medicine in the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, where he was popular with his fellow-students and led them in a riot. After qualifying he was described by his clinic chief as lazy, always looking for an easy way.

In 1983 he moved to Belgrade and became an ardent Serb nationalist. He served one year out of a four-year sentence for embezzlement. His energies and charisma made him the leader of the Serbian Democratic Party in the Bosnian Parliament, and then President of the 'Serbian Republic of Bosnia'. His policies as announced in his speeches from 1991 to 1994 have been fully documented<sup>16,17</sup>.

Karadžić cited an eighteenth century bishop who declared Moslems evil and urged their violent eradication. On the one hand, he accused the President of Bosnia of working to found the first Islamic State in modern Europe

to allow Islam to enter the West: the high Moslem birthrate was proof of the Moslem threat. Karadžić maintained that he was, as were his ancestors six hundred years ago, defending Europe from Moslem fundamentalism. He claimed that the Serbs were enslaved and the Croats were threatened by Islamic domination, that all Moslems should convert to Christianity, that the Moslem community would disappear from the face of the earth, and that his policies were blessed by the Serbian Orthodox Church. On the other hand, Karadžić maintained that he was a friend of all ethnic groups, that his wife's best friend was an Albanian, that ethnic cleansing was never part of his policy and that any ethnic transfer was because Moslems demanded the right to leave. The Serbs had never threatened anyone, the destruction of Sarajevo and the slaughter of its inhabitants were not due to Serbian shells but was from Moslems mining their own city, and only Serb and not Moslem women had been raped. Karadžić advised the Serbian military to pay no attention to what he did at conferences, because all the maps were transient and only what land they held was eternal, so that the soldiers should hold every village and not worry. Karadžić has not yet surrendered or been arrested to stand trial at The Hague for genocide.

## CROATIA

Serbian forces occupied Vukovar in November 1991 and the Croatian medical staff were forced to leave. One night a Serbian surgeon toured the hospital and identified to a Serb soldier 260 wounded Croat soldiers. They were taken away the next day and shot<sup>18</sup>.

## RWANDA

In April and May 1994 about 800 thousand Tutsis, out of a total of about 930 thousand, were massacred by Hutus, including Hutu doctors<sup>19</sup>. In the university hospital at Butari

'People were being expelled. Some of our [Hutu] doctors were colluding with the extremists: they expelled them [the Tutsi patients] and chased them out of the hospital to be killed . . . Some of the doctors were also conniving . . . And they were the doctors in charge. In the morning they would go round during the medical check . . . and they would say "This patient is healthy. Out, Out!" . . . So they had to go . . . After the road-blocks they were killed . . . The doctors were also asking for their ID cards before treating them. They refused to treat sick Tutsis [Some Hutu doctors courageously defended the Tutsi patients . . .]. The medical staff went around spreading the news [of peace] "Come out of hiding and go back to your homes, you have nothing to fear". So people came out. Later on these people were all killed'<sup>20</sup>.

In Kibeho hospital . . .

'the attack was directed by Dr Mutazihana. He stood outside while they were attacking the hospital . . . Everyone was killed . . . We saw Dr Mutazihana disconnect the electric engine so the lights went out. They killed all around the church'<sup>20</sup>.

Some doctors and Christian clergy put politics before ethics, and *Africa Rights* has listed them, beginning with two medical senior members of the interim government—Dr Theodore Sindikubwabo (president) and Dr Casimir Bizimungu (minister of health)<sup>20</sup>. In May 1999 Dr Clement Kayishema, a former governor, was given four life sentences by the UN Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda for inciting Hutus to kill unarmed Tutsis, including those hidden in churches<sup>21</sup>.

### NATIONALISM VERSUS MEDICAL ETHICS

In 1996 Kovacevic admitted: 'Omarska was planned as a reception centre . . . but it then turned into something else. I cannot explain the loss of control. You could call it collective madness'<sup>15</sup>. The head of the Rwanda Patriotic Front's human rights commission was not surprised that doctors put politics before ethics<sup>22</sup>; and Dr Mehmed Resid, a governor who massacred Armenians, explained before his suicide:

'Even though I am a physician, I cannot ignore my nationhood. I came into this world a Turk. My national identification takes precedence over everything else. Armenian traitors had found a niche for themselves in the bosom of the fatherland: they were dangerous microbes. Isn't it the duty of a doctor to destroy these microbes? Either the Armenians would liquidate the Turks and become proprietors of this land or they would be liquidated by the Turks. I couldn't possibly hesitate as to my option, and I opted. My Turkishness prevailed over my medical calling. Of course my conscience is bothering me, but I couldn't see my country disappearing. I shut my eyes and surged forth without reservation. As to historical responsibility I couldn't care less what historians of other nations write about me'<sup>5</sup>.

### THE EXPERIMENTAL PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL DATA ON OBEDIENCE

There have been several experiments on volunteers to test their theoretical or actual behaviour in a power role. In 1963 Milgram instructed 40 male volunteers aged 20–50 who were not high school or college students to give increasingly severe electric shocks to a subject who unknown to them was an accomplice who was not receiving

any shocks and was simulating distress<sup>23</sup>. Two-thirds of the men obeyed up to the level labelled 'Danger—severe shock', and in later studies similar proportions were found in 40 women, in Yale undergraduates, and whether the experiments were held in the psychology department at Yale or in a Bridgeport office building<sup>24</sup>. If the instructor was not standing over the volunteer, urging him to give these 'shocks', but had left the room and gave his orders over the telephone, then only 21% instead of 65% obeyed, and if the volunteer was free to choose the shock level only 2.5% used maximum shocks<sup>24</sup>.

In 1966 Canadian Quaker peace activists at their annual summer camp role-played a scenario. Thirty adults and six children non-violently resisted an 'occupation' by 'right-wing unionists'. The exercise was terminated by the umpires after 31 hours because the occupation force had 'killed' thirteen of the resisters<sup>25</sup>.

Mansson, a Danish social psychologist, presented students of the University of Hawaii with a fictionalized statement that the population explosion would endanger the fit and the intelligent because of the increasing numbers of the mentally and emotionally unfit, thus a policy of euthanasia (mercy killing) needed to be considered. Substantial majorities of the students approved of research on this topic provided that the danger to them (the fit and intelligent) was within the next 15–20 years, that the application of this 'final solution' should be through science and not war, and that the unfit population under discussion was in the USA or in minority groups. However, more than half the students rejected any such mercy killing for Asians, perhaps because 230 of the 570 students were of oriental ancestry<sup>26</sup>.

Charney and Fromer<sup>27</sup> gave a similar questionnaire to 92 Israeli students in medicine (20), clinical psychology (20), social work (20) and social psychology (32). Their fictionalized scenario implied that increasing scarcity of health care resources would make the authorities first limit and then stop treatment of the mentally handicapped, followed by a plan of mass euthanasia, with the option of the personal participation of the student in such killing. There were alternative sites for these plans—an African developing country, and Israel. The results for these two sites were similar in the proportions of the students agreeing to curtail treatment (39% and 38%), plan euthanasia (11% and 12%) and personally to terminate the lives of these patients (11% and 9%), nor were there any significant differences between the students of the four different disciplines.

### CONCLUSIONS

The genocide in the five countries described, and the experimental studies summarized above, support the claim by Charney and Fromer<sup>27</sup> of . . .

'evidence for the potential Nazi in all of us in the sense that there will always be significant numbers of human beings, in all ethnic and religious groups, at all levels of society, and under a great variety of structural conditions, who will be ready to do what they are told, or what the situation calls for, or to obey explicit orders to kill others'.

There have been various attempts in recent years to humanize doctors by changing the medical curriculum, by exposing students and young doctors to great non-scientific novels, poetry and plays, by making psychology and bioethics compulsory in the preclinical years and by ensuring that paediatrics and psychiatry are tested by compulsory questions and long or short cases in the final examinations. However, the specialties of the genocidal doctors described above were as follows. Sindikubwabo was a paediatrician<sup>20</sup>; Karadžić, who was a member of a literary circle and had studied poetry in a postgraduate programme at Columbia University, New York, was a psychiatrist<sup>16,17</sup>, and Sakir was professor of legal (ethical) medicine<sup>3</sup>.

Religious beliefs did not prevent, and may have encouraged, genocide. In Argentina the killers and the killed were mostly Roman Catholic; in Turkey Moslems killed Armenians; and in former Yugoslavia Greek Orthodox Serbs, Roman Catholic Croats and Bosnian Moslems killed each other.

How then can genocide be prevented<sup>28</sup>? Priority should be given to acceptance, implementation and teaching of international laws of humanity. Since July 1998 the Rome statute which created a permanent International Criminal Court has been ratified by more than sixty countries, even if opposed by the USA, Iraq and Libya. In November 1998 the British Law Lords decided that former government leaders may be extradited to stand trial for crimes against humanity. Another step would be some strengthening of international plans to ensure that history books in schools, colleges and universities reveal unsavoury facts about the past and do not peddle xenophobia and nationalist hate by 'a monstrous distortion of the truth for ideological purposes posing as serious historical analysis'<sup>11</sup>. National laws should prohibit denial of genocide.

In the former Soviet Union the Kazan cathedral in Leningrad was deconsecrated to house a Museum of Atheism in which the histories of the religions of the world were detailed together with their cruelties. Alas, in today's St Petersburg this cathedral has been reconsecrated and the museum is now only of religion, displaying only Russian Church Art. Perhaps just as all Bavarian schoolchildren are taken to see the Dachau concentration camp, educational authorities should organize visits to genocide museums so that 'if it ever was admitted... that genocide did take place... then it must follow that the... ideology that was

the ultimate cause of that genocide is false, inhuman and fit only for the dustbin of history'<sup>11</sup>.

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